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SUBJECT: CODEL SHAYS GOES TO SOUTHEASTERN TURKEY

REF: ANKARA 2863

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is a Consulate Adana cable.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: Representative Christopher Shays obtained first-hand insight into the Kurdish issue and efforts to counter the PKK during a November 27-28 visit to southeastern Turkey. He also toured the Habur border gate and was briefed on Turkish-Iraqi trade relations and supply operations for coalition forces in Iraq. While most interlocutors praised the AKP government's attempts to improve economic conditions, NGO representatives criticized the Turkish establishment's historic inability to deal effectively with the Kurdish issue. END SUMMARY.

DIYARBAKIR GOVERNOR

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¶3. (C) In Diyarbakir, governor Avni Mutlu discussed the links between economic conditions and terrorism, noting that the government's efforts to address urgent needs such as health care, provision of safe drinking water, and improved roads have helped reduce support for the PKK. The private sector has also grown in recent years; production of marble from local deposits has developed into a business generating over \$100 million annually and 80 percent of the local organized industrial zone's 150 sites are now occupied after only five years. But Mutlu noted that unemployment remains a serious problem and that, under the rubric of the Southeastern Anatolian Project (GAP), more land needs to be put under irrigation to spur employment.

¶4. (C) PKK violence has also cost the region, the governor said, noting that the group's attacks on innocent civilians cannot possibly be justified as a legitimate defense of Kurdish rights. He welcomed Shays, firm condemnation of the PKK and the recent deepening of U.S.-Turkish cooperation in efforts to counter the organization. He said that "the children in the mountains are our children -- we are not happy with anyone's death or pleased with anyone's tears." Mutlu hopes the U.S. can play a role in disarming the PKK and having them express themselves through politics. Many Turks, who were accustomed to America's staunch support during the Cold War, are disappointed that the U.S. has not done more against the PKK. Shays reiterated the USG's commitment to work with Turkey against the PKK, including through intelligence sharing.

CIVIL SOCIETY: GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS

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¶5. (C) Sezgin Tanrikulu, President of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, Sahismail Bedirhanoglu, head of a local business

association, and development worker Nurcan Baysal painted a mixed picture of current developments. They briefed Shays on the legacy of the conflict in the 1990's, when PKK violence stunted economic growth and the GOT forced about 1.5 million people to evacuate their villages in the region, causing serious damage to the agricultural economy and creating massive problems as people relocated to larger cities such as Diyarbakir. Per capital income in the southeast is about one-third the level of the Turkish average, unemployment is about 40% and half the population is less than 18 years old.

¶16. (C) Tanrikulu reported that since the PKK resumed violence in 2004 human rights violations by the government, including cases of death in custody and limitations on speech and assembly, have increased. He noted that the PKK was created and is perpetuated because the Kurdish issue has not been addressed and that, if the GOT had met the minimum demands of the Kurds, the PKK issue would be resolved.

¶17. (C) Bedirhanoglu was upbeat about recent political developments. "We want democratization and to reduce regional disparities and lower unemployment," he said. The AK Party government, which he noted was the first mainstream party to win support across the Kurdish region, has been constructive in dealing with these issues. But the Turkish military and the judiciary are in conflict with the government and block its progress. Baaysal was less optimistic, accusing the government of trying to improve living standards through programs that treat people as recipients of charity rather than as citizens who should be empowered to develop their own talents. She also expressed skepticism about the rosy plans for GAP-related expansion of employment, noting that the government had been making such promises for 20 years. Tanrikulu said that the PKK is losing popularity, but continued poverty could increase support for

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fundamentalists who could organize the way Hamas did in the Palestinian territories.

EPICENTER OF TURKISH-IRAQI TRADE

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¶18. (C) Shays met with Aydin Abak, the Sirnak sub-governor in charge of the Habur Gate, which handles virtually all freight going from Turkey to Iraq, including fuel and supplies destined for coalition forces. Abak briefed on the recent \$40m upgrade in the gate's infrastructure, a joint build-operate-transfer project between the GOT and TOBB, a national business association. The new facility has 24 vehicle lanes which currently process about 600-900 trucks per day in each direction and 300-400 cars and passenger vans. The head of the local customs office, Mehmet Ulusoy, explained that weapons, explosives, drugs, and cigarettes are the most common forms of contraband his officers intercept from Iraq. During a tour of the area, he showed Shays a state-of-the art x-ray machine that will be on line in a few weeks and will be able to scan trucks suspected of hauling illicit cargo. Operating at full capacity, the gate could process up to 5,000 trucks per day, according to Ulusoy.

¶19. (C) In a subsequent meeting, Adnan Elci and Halil Balkan, Presidents of the Cizre and Sirnak Chambers of Commerce, talked about the deepening economic ties between Turkey and Northern Iraq. Elci noted that, although Turkish exports have declined from \$8b/year to \$2.5/year due to tensions at the border and increases in Iraq's trade with Iran and Syria, he and other Turkish businessmen continue to pursue a variety of projects in northern Iraq's Kurdish region, including a major hotel development in Erbil. Balkan urged the U.S. to play an active role in encouraging an improvement in political relations and cooperation on the PKK issue between Ankara and the KRG. He said that commercial relations can also play a role in improving the atmosphere.

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¶10. (C) At the St. Gabriel Monastery in Mardin province, Shays met with Bishop Samuel Aktas, who voiced concern about continuing difficulties his community faces because the GOT does not accord Assyrian Christians the privileges associated with officially recognized "minorities." As a result, the church is not allowed to have a seminary inside Turkey, which forces all of its clergy to train abroad. Aktas said that he and his colleagues fully support Turkey's efforts to integrate with the EU and want Turkey to develop the levels of tolerance found in European countries.

¶11. (U) While violence against his church members is rare, during Shays' visit to the monastery, Aktas learned that an Assyrian priest from a neighboring town had been kidnapped by unknown assailants who demanded EURO 300,000 in ransom. (The priest was released the following day.)

INTENSE MEDIA SCRUTINY

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¶12. (U) Shays' visit to the southeast received extensive coverage in the national media; he gave a brief impromptu press conference for about two dozen reporters in Cizre, near the Habur Gate. In his remarks, Shays stated his interest in visiting the region of Turkey that borders Iraq and reaffirmed President Bush's formulation that the PKK is an enemy of Turkey, Iraq and the U.S. He added that the U.S. wants Iraq to succeed as an independent, unified country and needs Turkey's help to achieve that goal.

¶13. (U) Codel Shays did not clear this message.

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WILSON